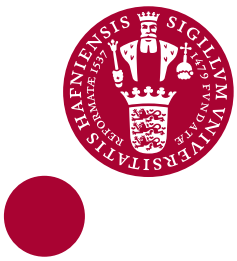

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How Good Soldiers Become-with Their Uniforms

An Exploration of Uniformity in Practice

By Beate Sløk-Andersen

"Sløk, you look like shit! You're a soldier, for God's sake – look like one!" (Field notes, week 12)

This was the reaction I received early one morning during a four-day military drill I was participating in as part of my fieldwork in the Danish army. Like the rest of the platoon, I had spent the night sleeping in a simple tarpaulin tent-like construction in the woods and was now getting ready to start a new day. I figured that it would make sense to fetch some water for the daily 'field shower' before getting my uniform in order. Thus, my jacket was unbuttoned, I was wearing neither hat nor helmet, and my weapon and my combat belt (containing ammunition and other at-hand essentials) were lying on the ground next to my tent. But as the quotation indicates, the platoon's second-in-command, Sergeant Bolt, did not agree with my assessment of the situation. If I had remembered the words he uttered months earlier – "The first thing people see when they look at a soldier is the uniform" (field notes, week 1) – I would probably not have left my tent without my uniform being in order.

A uniform makes members of the armed forces recognizable. This attire camouflages differences by downplaying marks of individuality and stressing – well, uniformity. In this article, I explore how this is not only apparent in literal terms but also how we might understand the uniform as a materiality that is embedded in a performance that makes its wearer recognizable as a military subject. Based on empirical material from the Danish army, this article offers insight into the uniformity that uniforms are expected to constitute, while it also challenges this same uniformity by examining the seemingly mundane, embodied routines of conscripted soldiers. The article hereby utilizes an ethnological approach to explore the productive effects of such attire; specifically, by asking how the uniform constitutes and negotiates the becoming of military subjects through everyday routines. The article pays particular attention to the material-discursive entanglement of matter that takes place when the uniform is 'done' by these young soldiers.

Exploring Uniforms from the Perspective of Everyday Life

When I decided to conduct participatory fieldwork among conscripted soldiers, I had anticipated that a superior might yell at me; however, I had not foreseen the difficulties that came along with wearing the uniform. I had embarked on this part of my fieldwork three months earlier to explore how young Danish citizens are transformed into soldiers through the entanglement of elements such as physical training, disciplining measures, social interaction, and materiality. At the time I was planning my fieldwork, Sweden and several NATO member states had abolished this compulsory military service, and the outlook for the Danish conscription system did not seem very good. Nonetheless, it has persisted despite recurrent debates on alternative structures and reductions in the Danish Armed Forces – albeit in a reduced form of four months of basic training for most of the 4,200 conscripts doing military service each year. I was intrigued by the system's perseverance, which was strengthened when Sweden reintroduced conscription and Nor-

way expanded its draft to include women (the latter has brought about new research efforts, see e.g. Lilleaas & Ellingsen 2014).

Scholars before me have been curious about conscription and the ways in which the subject is disciplined within a military context (Goffman 1968; Damsholt 2000; Wollinger 2000; Foucault 2008). In this article, my intention is to expand upon these studies by drawing upon perspectives from post-humanism and post-feminism in order to emphasize the effect of materiality in this process. Specifically, I move beyond the body of the soldiers to explore how the materiality of the uniform is involved in constituting recognizable military subjects. Through this lens, my analysis unfolds how this can be understood as a process of constant work and negotiation, particularly because the conscripts' willingness and ability to be recognizable as a military subject varied, in part due to the uniform. While, at a glance, the importance of the uniform could appear to be a *visual* uniformity, a broader perception of uniformity allows for a more complex exploration of how the uniform participates in the becoming of *good soldiers*; I return to this figure later in the article.

Within the field of ethnology, studies of military issues have been "surprisingly" scarce (Engman 2013:114), especially when narrowed down to projects with a contemporary focus. In Scandinavia, the main contributions are Jonas Engman's work on the Swedish navy (2002, 2013) and Susanne Wollinger's close detail of conscripts in the Swedish army (2000). Like them, my work takes an everyday – life approach to studying the military setting; however, I pay greater attention to the uniform and the daily *routines* in which it is embedded. In particular, I have been curious about how practices and rationales that at first seemed exotic became new norms during the four months; how "strange" practices became unnoticed everyday routines. In

The author literally in the military field.

this regard, I draw inspiration from ethnologists Orvar Löfgren and Billy Ehn, who have argued that it is through everyday routines "anchored in the body" that tasks and actions become almost invisible to us (2010:82; see also Ehn 2011 and Löfgren 2014).

Dress scholars also support an analytical approach that focuses on routines. Ingun G. Klepp and Mari Bjerck (2014) have for instance argued that, when gathering empirical material for an analysis of uniforms, methods such as interviews or textual analysis alone should not form the basis of the work, as they are insufficient to capture the automated routines and *tacit knowledge* essential to dressing. Following this argument, my analysis draws upon interviews along with auto-ethnographic experiences and observational studies, primarily from my fieldwork at one particular military camp.[1] Using the empirical material that these methods generated, I explore how we might understand the 'production' of military subjects in relation to embodied practices and routines connected to the uniform. Or how, in the words of Donna Haraway (2008), the becoming of good soldiers can be seen as a *becoming-with* the military uniform.

Previous Studies of Uniforms

The essential role of the uniform in the being and becoming of soldiers has been emphasized in earlier studies. According to the historian Karsten Skjold Petersen (2014), the introduction of uniforms in the Danish-Norwegian army in the seventeenth century served two main purposes: a practical and a tactical purpose. The practical function was to protect the soldier against all types of weather, and the tactical function was for the soldiers to be recognizable; e.g., on the battlefield or as an authority. Expanding on this question of authority, the anthropologist Erella Grassiani has argued, based on her empirical studies of Israeli soldiers, that "[t]he uniforms they wear and the weapons they carry materialize the power that soldiers have" (2013:85). While I recognize the authority that a uniform implies, I challenge the static conception of uniforms that Grassiani presents. In her definition, the uniform becomes an external representation of a pre-existing power relation, and it is interpreted as having one fixed meaning that applies to everyone who wears the uniform. As an alternative, I provide greater detail as to how uniforms come to matter in different ways through practice, and how the implied authority that is typically associated with the uniform is the result of entangled matter and routines.

In non-military settings, uniforms have been described as being entangled with issues of hierarchy, discipline, and the diminishment of individuality (Craik 2005; Larsson 2008; Neumann *et al*. 2012; Leilund 2015), presumably due to the military origin of uniforms (Larsson 2008: 14–15). And indeed, military uniforms have influenced the design of non-military uniforms as well as fashion trends in a broader sense (Black 2014). This relation between military uniforms and non-military apparel supports a broader scepticism about making clear distinctions between separate military and civic spheres (Enloe 2000). In this article, I focus on the use of military uniforms but also reflect on what happens when these uniforms "travel" beyond the military setting.

Within ethnology and related fields, we have already seen a more practice-oriented approach to the study of uniforms. For example, in her doctoral work, Marianne Larsson (2008) examined the development of uniform practice within the Swedish postal services from the seventeenth century until today, specifically exploring how uniforms work to establish and negotiate uniformity. Utilizing a variety of empirical material, Larsson describes how the uniform creates docile bodies that should contribute to the ongoing durability of the postal services while simultaneously constituting internal power relations. Larsson stresses how the uniform has participated in disciplining postal workers and, related to this, how the wearer of the uniform came to "carry the institution with him" (2008:12). My analysis builds upon these findings by describing how the disciplining enabled by the uniform depends on specific situations; the uniform entangles with many other elements that change its matter from one setting to another. Thus, my contemporary perspective prompts new understandings of uniforms in practice.

Using a similar approach, Helle Leilund (2015) has also challenged ideas about the uniform as an object that is able to "do something specific" to the wearer. After conducting ethnographic fieldwork among nurses, postal workers, and train conductors, Leilund describes how uniforms can be 'done' in different ways – despite formal regulations and the uniformity of the design – thus making it a "complex phenomenon that *is* something different, dependent on [the] practice the uniform is done in" (2015:100). Following this conceptualization of the uniform, Leilund argues that there is a mutual relation between the uniform and its wearer, in which both parties 'do' each other. This reflects the idea of the military subject becoming-with the uniform that I attempt to unfold.

Being Recognized as a G*ood Soldier*

During my fieldwork, conscripts as well as sergeants[2] articulated the image of *the good soldier* as something to aspire to in everyday situations. For instance, it was often repeated that "a good soldier is a lazy soldier", implying that a good soldier does things correctly the first time around instead of being sloppy and having to do the task over. But as the quotation opening this article suggests, this not only requires an internalized desire to do things correctly but also knowledge of what "good" might imply in a given situation. I should have known and wanted to do the right thing: A good soldier should not need correction but would instinctively know what is the correct thing to do (as also argued in Damsholt 2000). As the company's second-in-command, Lieutenant Olsen, had told us: "We're nice when we explain something the first time, but after that, we expect you to know it" (field notes, week 1).

In my analytical approach, I take the good soldier to be more than a mere expression; it is an agentic figure constituted through everyday routines. My initial inspiration for this approach came from the post-feminist scholar Judith Butler's conceptualization of *recognition*. Butler argues that humans can only be recognized as subjects if they live up to certain (gendered) patterns (1990; 1993). As she describes it, these patterns are defined via

the heterosexual matrix in which compulsory relations between one's sex, gender, and sexual desire are defined (1990). For instance, a male individual should act masculine and desire women – and vice versa for females. This way, the matrix (re)produces gendered patterns by regulating how one's gender and sexuality should be performed. Following Löfgren and Ehn's definition of routines (2010), we could see the gender performances as expressions of *tacit knowledge* and a sort of "autopilot mode" within us that organize a *shared choreography*. If the consistency of the matrix is not reiterated through our performances, Butler argues, then we cannot be recognized as someone worthy of, for example, having rights or being treated equal to others. As such, Butler writes that recognition is "a site of power by which the human is differentially produced" (2004:2).

I am adapting this conceptualization of recognition in the way that *the good soldier* becomes the matrix through which soldiers are recognized through the performance of acceptable patterns for how to be a good soldier. Through this lens, I will explore how the figure of the good soldier – just like the gender categories in Butler's case – is practised and reconfigured through speech, materialization, and embodiment. Just as a certain gender uniformity is established via the heterosexual matrix, so too is the figure of the good soldier perceived as participating in the establishment of a certain uniformity among conscripts. However, as Butler has been criticized for neglecting any materiality beyond that of the body (Barad 2003; Mol 2002), I also draw on the philosopher Annemarie Mol's concept of agency as a distributed practice arising through the entanglement of (material) actors (2002; 2008). Reflecting how I intend to approach the figure of the good soldier, Mol and John Law suggest that "[i]n complex, mundane, material practices 'the good' tends to figure as something to tinker towards – silently" (2002:85).

Linking Butler and Mol, I will explore how uniforms are done – or become-with – the enactment of good soldiers, as this ties to the *performative* 'nature' of recognition that Butler argues for as "that power of discourse to produce effects through reiteration" (1993:20). This definition indicates a processual approach, as the reiterations are constant work; the recognition of someone as a good soldier is never secure. The recognition needs continuous enactments because "a signifier, rather than simply naming something that already exists, works to generate that which it apparently names" (Ahmed 2012:92). And while terms like "enactment" and "performativity" might imply a certain optionality or detachment, the very real consequences of failed recognition may emerge as a lost opportunity for a military career, an absence of appraisal, or a negative evaluation. By using the uniform as an entry point, I unfold this process of becoming – or not becoming – a good soldier.

A Question of Uniformity

On the first morning of the conscription period, we were given orders to remove all obvious signs of individuality: beards had to be shaved off, make-up was not allowed, loose hair was to be pulled back in a tight bun, bangs had to be tucked in under the beret, jewellery was not allowed

(except for wedding rings), and visible piercings were to be removed if possible. "You need to be alike," we were told.

Sergeant Wilson, who was training his fourth cohort of conscripts, elaborated on this requirement during the interview I conducted with him. Arguing for the usefulness of conscription as a way to teach people about cohesion and collaboration, he linked this to uniformity:

> And this is already introduced on the first day, where we kinda rip people's clothes off and then put all of them in the same uniform. Without earrings and nose piercings and all of those things that constitute the individual and signal "who I am as a person". We tear people away from that a bit and say, "You are part of a unit now, and you have to cooperate as a unit. You are not done before the last person is done". (Interview with Sgt. Wilson)

As this quotation illustrates, the camouflage pattern of the conscripts' uniform is intended to camouflage individuality; minimizing overt differences in appearance is thought to enable cohesion, collaboration, and collective responsibility. The belief seemed to be "The less individuality, the stronger the military unit". And through this belief, the uniform – as well as the entailed absence of markers of individuality – was positioned as crucial to the creation of a combatant platoon. Reflecting the work Mol, the interview quotation supports the argument that "[a] lot of *things* are involved" in the performance of identity (2002:38).

The transformation of a diverse group of civilians into a homogeneous platoon was pursued by first "breaking down" and then "rebuilding" conscripts, as I was told during my initial meeting at the military camp a few days before I embarked on the journey of becoming a soldier myself (field notes, week 1). And while much has undoubtedly changed in the armed forces since the sociologist Erving Goffman wrote *Asylums* in 1961, I could not help but associate this description of breaking down and rebuilding with Goffman's description of *total institutions* as "the forcing houses for changing persons; each is a natural experiment on what can be done to the self" (1968:22). Sergeant Wilson's words are even echoed in the following snippet: "Uniforms are issued on the first day […] The role of the cadet must supersede other roles the individual has been accustomed to play" (ibid.: 25).

The perception of *cohesion* as an essential element in the efficacy of a military unit is widespread in military studies (King 2013). For example, the issue of cohesion has been a recurrent concern in debates about integrating women into combat troops: Opponents have insisted that cohesion would be difficult, even impossible, if the 'band of brothers' was disrupted by the presence of women (for an outline of the opposition, see MacKenzie 2015). For Sergeant Wilson, it was precisely the concept of cohesion that attracted him to the armed forces in the first place; something he now honoured via his uniform, "making sure that it is always in order" because, by doing so, he believed that he was "representing all other soldiers, the entire armed forces" (Interview with Sgt. Wilson).

As the following excerpt from an interview with one of the conscripts suggests, the uniform seemed to have the desired effect of creating a feeling of cohesion *through* the uniformity of our appearance. This was brought up when I asked Madsen to explain what she felt when she put on her uniform:

Madsen: It differs, actually. Because there are times when I think, "This is actually pretty cool." But that's because I'm thinking about the social aspects […] this thing where you have a lot of great friends, but you don't really know them. You know nothing about them, you just become really good friends.
Sløk: How do uniforms relate to this thing about being best friends?
Madsen: It's this thing about everyone being similar in some way. There's no one you look down on or anything like that because we're the same, y'know, in the context of the armed forces. (Interview with Madsen)

To Madsen, the social aspect of doing conscription was important. She was one of the conscripts with whom I spent the most time, as we were both in the same dorm room and the same squad during drills. And although I felt that the uniform did not fully conceal the fact that my presence in the platoon was motivated by a different purpose than the other conscripts, Madsen did not seem to mind. In general, the uniform did indeed make it easier for me to fit into the platoon because it made all of us more similar, as reflected in Madsen's quotation above. By not standing out, either by wearing different apparel or by physically standing on the sidelines, it was mostly forgotten that I was there for different reasons than my fellow conscripts – as long as I acted in a way that made me recognizable as a good soldier (Sløk-Andersen 2017). Even if some of the sergeants wanted to be cautious around me and treat me differently because I was 'the researcher', it was often difficult for them to tell us apart. This became particularly clear on the occasions where I was called by the name of one of the male conscripts in my squad (we were the same height, and our small buns of blond hair on the back of our heads apparently made us look similar from behind). In this way, the uniform enabled my becoming as a military subject while it also – as I illustrate in the following – constituted a collective self through disciplining mechanisms connected to the uniform.

Telling one conscript from the next could be difficult due to the uniformity established with the uniform. Here, the platoon is lined up one early morning during a drill.

Control and Correction

While uniformity may be considered highly important to the creation of a combatant platoon, keeping track of the various uniform parts in a dorm room with eleven other people was a challenge. Each of us had five pairs of khaki-coloured socks, which meant a total of 120 similar socks in our dorm room. Imagine the confusion. But while this material uniformity might not have seemed very practical to those responsible for keeping track of the uniform parts, the uniform seemed to enable certain disciplining mechanisms that made us recognizable as military subjects.

At first, the uniform felt neither comfortable nor empowering. As I wrote in my field notes on day two, "it does not feel familiar at all", followed by comments about all the small details to which I had to pay attention: Are the shoelaces sticking out, are any of the pockets open, is the beret placed correctly on my head? The process of getting accustomed to the uniform was, however, pushed by practices of *control* and *correction* that were a recurrent theme throughout the conscription period. While still in this highly insecure period of feeling estranged by the uniform, some of the sergeants took joy in 'helping' us get our uniforms in order:

> In the canteen, two sergeants from another platoon are seated further down the same long table as us, having lunch. They are talking across the table but their conversation is interrupted numerous times as one of them calls out to many of the conscripts passing by. He yells at them to point out that their uniforms are not in order and to correct them at once. Unbuttoned pockets, missing nametags on jackets, curled-up collars. The sergeant is clearly enjoying yelling at the conscripts, giving them orders to stop and correct their uniforms. Out of fear of getting the same treatment, the two conscripts I am having lunch with and I stay seated until the two sergeants have left. (Based on field notes; Tuesday, week 1)

Routines of control were a recurrent part of the day at the military camp. It started every morning at 07:25 when we had our first contact with the sergeants; they would enter our dorm rooms to inspect the room as well as each of us. Besides making sure that we had all of our equipment in order, they would also check the room's cleanliness, the order of things in our closets, and our individual appearance. This would be done by a sergeant standing in front of each of us, only one or two feet away, while we stood *at attention*, looking to the right. Standing like this, the sergeant would inspect us, making sure that the uniform was in order and no camouflage face paint, earrings, or stubble was visible on the neck or face. These situations of being put on individual display often resulted in nervousness and silence in the room.

Discipline, as Foucault has argued, is often centred on "the detailed control" (Damsholt 2000:61), not only by others but also by oneself (Foucault 2008). For us, the sergeants' external gaze was quickly internalized as we were encouraged to control ourselves and each other before standing in front of the sergeants – as a way of "helping each other", we were told. Not only before this morning inspection, but continuously throughout the day: When lining up, when entering or exiting buildings, before drills, before parades, and so on. We would ask the person next to us, "Did you remember your helmet?" or yell out in the dorm room "Does everyone have their maintenance gear?"

This control amongst ourselves was further encouraged through the concept of *collective responsibility*; if someone forgot a glove, no one else was allowed to wear gloves because we were all responsible for the actions of others in the platoon. As when Bisgaard, the quite confused conscript with whom I shared a bunkbed, lost his folding knife during week six, and those of us sharing a dorm room with him became responsible for him not losing any more of his things. After that incident, it became part of our daily routine to ask Bisgaard if he had remembered all of his equipment, especially the folding knife. This became yet another part of our *shared choreography* that was never planned or discussed between us; it just became a pattern of daily routines that were embodied as tacit knowledge. According to Ehn and Löfgren, the advantage of routines lies in their ability to "liberate us from energy-demanding choices such as whether to first put on the left or the right shoe, and whether to boil, fry, or scramble the breakfast eggs" (2010:91). In much the same way, the routine of controlling each other's uniforms became part of a collective autopilot that integrated these routines in our daily life without us thinking much about it.

As an almost natural addition to these disciplining mechanisms that installed control as a practice between conscripts, we also *corrected* each other's uniforms. This was done not just by pointing out that something was out of order but by actually correcting it; straightening a collar, tucking in a shirttail, or closing a pocket. In this way, the clothing on my body, which I would normally consider to be within my personal sphere, became a collective space for control and correction. Not just by sergeants but also by other conscripts. These routines did not only participate in disciplining us as military subjects, they also installed both an individual and a collective internalized gaze (Foucault 2008), which constituted a form of collective self.

Both conscripts as well as sergeants justified these routines of control and correction – which made the armed forces seem exotic to me at first – as a consequence of the potentially fatal outcome of errors when you are a soldier. Following this rationale, Lindberg had no problem making sense of the continuous control of buttons and other tiny routines that were part of our everyday life at the military camp:

> Well, Sgt. DC is my squad sergeant and he doesn't care much about cleaning and stuff like that. But the pockets on our combat belt [containing ammunition, water bottle, etc.] better damn be closed! Because if you lose something, it might be what ends up costing someone else their life. A comrade. (Interview with Lindberg)

As this quotation illustrates, uniformity and control related to the uniform was not just a question of creating cohesion or a way of disciplining. It was also a matter of being able to do the best job possible; of being a good soldier able to keep your comrades alive. As such, the control enacted through daily routines and shared choreographies of correcting each other meant protecting the collective self in the potential line of fire.

While many conscripts did not consider themselves to be 'real' soldiers, the idea of being in *the line of fire* was the backdrop for much of the teaching and doctrines. For example, the hierarchal structure in

the armed forces was understood as a completely natural way to organize the military sphere because being under attack does not allow time for an unclear or ambiguous power structure. As the colonel in charge of the regiment explained to me: "We don't hold back, we tell it like it is. But that has an operational reason: If we debate for too long and [are] too unclear, we will die" (interview with Col. Johnsen). In this way, the disciplining measures related to the control and correction of the uniforms were entangled with being a good soldier in imagined (or, to some of the sergeants, actually experienced) life-or-death scenarios of a real soldier. Through the performance of daily routines of control and correction, most conscripts tried their best to perform as good soldiers – while knowing that they were far from being real soldiers.

The Entangled Matter of Uniforms

With regard to the uniform, the ideal of always being able to save a comrade's life was not the only aspect of what it means to be a good soldier that appeared. During my fieldwork, I had a couple of one-on-one talks and interviews with our platoon commander, Lieutenant Petersen. In the following scenario, I was asking him questions about the ranking system, and how strictly it applies to everyday situations. This led to the following reflections:

Lt. Petersen: We wouldn't have had the same possibility to discipline, I think.

Sløk: If it hadn't been for the rank system? How are the two connected?

Lt. Petersen: There is no doubt about who is in charge because you can *see* it. And you can see how they are ranked in accordance with each other, those who are in charge […] I think that when you have the ranking system, then you are more prone to accept what is said. (Second interview with Lt. Petersen)

The lieutenant went on to provide an example of how people outside the military camp would react differently if he gave orders wearing his uniform versus his 'civilian' clothes; the uniform would no doubt make people more prone to follow his orders. We might say that the uniform makes him recognizable as a military subject entitled to give orders; a good soldier that can claim authority.

Through Lieutenant Petersen's description, it becomes clear how authority and discipline are entangled and done through the materiality of the uniform and the routines of which it is a part. While everyone wearing a military uniform might seem alike to those not familiar with the small details inscribing information on the uniforms, these details matter among the wearers. Without the ranking system inscribed in and on the uniform jacket, the authority that is distributed accordingly would entangle in a different way. But the differing matter of the uniform is not merely dependent on the signs on its surface, as distinctions and medals inscribing information about rank and previous deployment experiences. Rather, it comes to matter through the material-discursive entanglement of elements, such as the ranking system, disciplining mechanisms enabled by military law, the fabric of the uniform, the tone of voice in which orders are given, and certain ways of moving and standing (for the latter, see Sløk-Andersen 2017). All of these elements are entangled when Lieutenant Petersen's uniform comes to matter, and the effect of the uniform would be different if even just one of the entangled elements was absent.

This shifting entanglement of matter in the uniform was obvious if we travelled home during the weekend while wearing it. We were granted this opportunity after a couple of weeks; at that point we were considered to be able to act "properly" outside the military camp – which meant something along the lines of sitting up straight and being polite to others. And even with the sergeants and their disciplining measures out of sight, the imperative to have our uniforms in order and to act properly when wearing the uniform was already embedded in us; this was a part of our performance as good soldiers that we carried with us. The embodied routines kept us within the limits of recognition: Taking off the beret when entering a building, rolling it up and putting it into the pocket by the right knee happened without thinking much about it. Even those who grew discontented with doing military service seemed to still act properly when we went to the train station together on Friday afternoons – or they just did not wear the uniform home.

However, the uniformity and the feeling of 'being in this together' that were established with the uniform slowly disappeared when we left the military camp. Outside the camp's fence, we were seen as "representatives of the entire Danish Armed Forces", as Sergeant Bolt had told us (Field notes, week 5). Here, the hierarchal differences that put sergeants in a position to control and correct our uniforms receded as elements entangled differently in the uniform. Outside the military camp, the uniformity of our attire made us recognizable as soldiers rather than conscripts, which made the military ranking system disappear. The authority that had, up until now, been associated with the uniforms that our sergeants wore was hereby enabled for us to perform – if only for a short while. This concurrently made a shift in what it meant to be a good soldier, as obedience at the bottom of the hierarchy inside the military camp was exchanged for authority outside the camp's fence.

Despite the changing matter of the uniform, it seemed as though it came with a certain way of acting, of moving, of talking, of thinking: a certain pattern for how to perform, which I argue is informed by the figure of the good soldier, even if the routines tied to this performance shifted depending on the elements that were entangled in the uniform.

Challenging the Idea of Uniformity

While the uniform did indeed participate in creating uniformity, it simultaneously seemed to make other elements more visible. I discovered that, over the course of the four-month conscription period, good soldiers did not need to be completely similar after all. While a basic requirement for being recognizable as a good soldier was still to have your uniform in order and keep track of all of your equipment, some conscripts seemed to stand out from the crowd more than others.

While promoting the recent introduction of gender-mixed dorm rooms at the camp, our company commander (who was called "Boss", as he was at the top of the local hierarchy) initially told us:

> We do not evaluate due to gender, but due to competences […] To me, you are not men and women, but rather competences that I can use to solve tasks. Some are really smart, and others are really strong. (Field notes, week 1)

The uniform was believed to conceal gender differences; it was expected to make us all non-gendered soldiers, which echoes Sergeant Wilson's aforementioned argument that the uniform removes the elements that signal "who I am as a person". Competences, however, were seen as differing from one conscript to the next. They were apparently not camouflaged by the uniform – quite the opposite, I would argue, as they affected one's ability to be recognized as a good soldier. To illustrate the way in which this is entangled with the uniform, I next present an example centred on the highly ordinary act of peeing.

Being a conscript was strongly related to the feeling of being in a hurry: Everything always had to be done as quickly as possible. We were given a specific number of minutes for most tasks, and it almost always felt like too little time. This was also the case when needing to urinate, which was particularly challenging during drills. Here, having to wear a belt with two small buckles as well as pants with both a zipper and a button made peeing a time-consuming task for some of us. Before I had even got my pants down by my ankles and squatted, those who could easily just zip down the fly in their pants and pee standing up had almost finished. Having a male squad sergeant meant that breaks during drills or patrols were timed based on how long it took him to pee. And because he peed standing up, he was quite fast at getting it over with and calling on us to line up again. By the time this happened, I would still have to stand up, zip and button my pants, close the two buckles of the belt, and put on the rest of my equipment. And while those standing up to pee often just took one step to the side, I would go looking for a bit of cover before exposing my entire lower body to the world. Needless to say, it was usually a woman who lined up last after these breaks.

Exploring the material-discursive enactment of gender in academia, the ethnologist Tine Damsholt (2013) has argued that uniformity in the materiality that covers the body can make other elements visible, including gender, due to the material-discursive entanglement in a given setting (see also Mol 2002). It appeared the same in this scenario, where female physiology, the design of the uniform, and routines designated by a male squad sergeant entangled in a way that made it very difficult for women in particular to meet the requirements for being punctual. Because being on time was presented as an essential part of being a good soldier, this entanglement made gender appear in the performance of being a good soldier. I could not recognize myself as a good soldier in these situations due to the routines that were established around the recurrent act of peeing. While the uniform was meant to camouflage gender categories, it simultaneously made gender present in these situations.

Yet uniformity also challenged the performance of certain competences. An example of this appeared during drills and exercises when the platoon was divided into four squads, each led by a squad sergeant and supported by a second-in-command. The latter was appointed among the conscripts in the squad and was referred to as an *alpha*. The alpha would help manage

the rest of the squad, which included supervising the routines of control and correction; the squad sergeant thus 'lent' authority to these conscripts. It was never explained to the rest of us why some were appointed for this role, so I made sure to ask about it in my interviews with the squad sergeants. As Sergeant DC explained how he used the alpha role to test conscripts' potential for advancement to sergeant after the conscription period, he told me:

> So here we make sort of an assessment of how the person works in relation to this group. Does this person command respect? Or, "command respect" that sounds quite harsh, but can this person actually get the group to do something without the rest of them going "Sure, sure, we'll just do it later," y'know? (Interview with Sgt. DC)

However, the alphas experienced that it can be difficult to stand out from uniformity. When trying to perform the routines of our sergeants – e.g., ordering us to go through each pocket of our combat belts to ensure that everything was where it was supposed to be – the alphas were often met with arguments, complaints, or even someone giving them the finger. Those who were not considered to be particularly good soldiers by the other conscripts had the hardest job; why follow orders from someone who is not considered to be good at their job? But "commanding respect" was to some degree a challenge for all the alphas, as their uniforms were not inscribed with a change in authority; they showed the same rank as those conscripts the alphas were trying to lead. Shutting up and doing what we were told without arguing or resisting came naturally when sergeants gave us orders, even the sergeants we did not know – like the one who was correcting uniforms in the canteen – because their uniforms revealed a rank higher than ours. But with these conscripts who wore uniforms identical to the rest of us, the uniformity that was supposed to ensure cohesion now challenged their attempts to perform leadership. The authority that came to matter when travelling home while wearing the uniform was now absent. In the role of alpha, the entanglement of the uniform challenged attempts to prove themselves as good soldiers through routines that were otherwise unnoticed when performed by the sergeants.

However, when gender was added to this entanglement, it seemed as though some alphas were more challenged than others. After already observing how the one female sergeant in our platoon seemed to struggle with being accepted as an authority, the issue also appeared during an interview with Nielsen, the only female conscript in our platoon to be appointed alpha. When I asked what it was like to give orders to other conscripts, Nielsen told me about her struggle to carry out the role of alpha because her male colleagues "might think it sucks being bossed around by a 20-year-old girl". This impression was based on a sense of not always being "taken seriously" and having to "prove [herself] more" (interview with Nielsen). She hesitated when explaining this to me, perhaps a bit unsure if this was a valid assessment of the situation, but when I later interviewed one of her male colleagues, Christoffersen, he said:

> I respect her. I think she's a good alpha, and I understand why she's alpha instead of me and all that, whereas many might think, "Oh, but she's only alpha because she's a girl" […] It's not like that. I can sense that she's fighting for it. She's passionate about it. She wants it. And that's why I just have respect [for her] instead. And I think it's too bad that she isn't getting the credit that… sometimes should be given. (Interview with Christoffersen)

While "commanding respect" was challenged by the uniformity established through the uniform, leadership simultaneously seemed to bring gender to the front. Building on Damsholt's argument that uniform attire might bring other differences to the front, I question the assumption that a military uniform always camouflages gender. Rather, gender differences were reiterated and brought to the front through the entanglement of uniformity, authority, and leadership. In this way, the alpha role transformed the matter of the uniform. While the uniform made it difficult to stand out, the uniformity it established simultaneously made some conscripts stand out; for instance, by constituting gender differences.

When Recognition is Challenged

While the struggle for most alphas to be recognized as good soldiers was primarily tied to their attempts to claim authority, other conscripts were challenged in a broader sense by seeming to do few things 'correctly'. One of these conscripts was Hajjar. As he was often positioned right in front of me during marches and line-ups, I knew about the continuous corrections, yelling, and sighing that he encountered from sergeants as well as other conscripts (including myself). Hajjar had signed up for military service to make his father proud but had discovered that the job was "too tough" for him. Nevertheless, he persisted in his attempts to be a good soldier, thus illustrating the processual and performative nature of military subjectivity. During my interview with him, Hajjar also pointed to the felt experience of (his attempted) becoming-with the uniform:

> Well, you have to look good when you're a soldier and travel home [for the weekend] in your uniform. Then you need to look nice and be an adult. You shouldn't *act* like an adult; you should actually *be* an adult. (Interview with Hajjar)

The quotation suggests that the military subjectivity enabled and enacted through the uniform is not just a detached persona that can be switched on and off; rather, it is a question of the self. The performance of the good soldier is about becoming a specific self through the entanglement of elements such as disciplined bodies, life-and-death scenarios, and uniforms. For Hajjar, this feeling of recognition failed to appear: Neither he nor others in the platoon recognized him as a good soldier, despite the fact that he wore the uniform throughout the four months. As such, his hope for a career in the armed forces slowly disappeared.

For others, the desire to be recognized as a good soldier was not as present as it was for Hajjar. Some conscripts ended up regretting having signed up for military service and tried to avoid the uniform as much as possible; one conscript attempted to be classified as a conscientious objector halfway through the four months, while others seemed to push the limit of how many sick days could be accepted.

Dalgaard, who was in my dorm room, had given up on the idea of a military career after the first two drills in the forest. Being cold, exhausted, and far away from any fast-food vendors had made him realize that maybe being a soldier was not his dream job after all. Following this realization, Dalgaard seemed to use any excuse to make a minimal effort or to not participate at all, while avoiding any formal punishment. Being sloppy when it came to keeping the uniform in order could be an example of this. As I wrote in my field notes:

> Meanwhile, Sgt. Kleinmann controls our attire. He always finds mistakes. "Come on, look yourself up and down before I do," he yells. In a sharp and loud tone of voice, Dalgaard is told that he is "a fucking loser without any self-respect". I find out later that this outburst from Sgt. Kleinmann was a reaction to Dalgaard not having buttoned his jacket. (Field notes, week 5)

From his performance, it was clear that Dalgaard did not want to be a good soldier, and the sergeants picked up on that. And while this is one of the harsher reactions from a sergeant, it is a vivid example of why most of us eagerly tried to avoid being corrected; we felt embarrassment and discomfort when a sergeant scolded us for not performing in a way that aligned with being a good soldier. But Dalgaard did not change his behaviour accordingly. Rather, he seemed to care less and less – which was somewhat frustrating to those of us who shared a dorm room with him, as we were still bound to the concept of collective responsibility. By not wanting to be recognized as a good soldier, Dalgaard stopped being part of our shared choreography, which then challenged *our* chances of being recognized as good soldiers.

Reflecting on the theoretical basis for this analysis, the question then becomes: What happens when someone is not interested in being recognized as a good soldier? When someone does not practise the routines that were initially motivated by a desire to be recognized? This might indicate a shortcoming in the theoretical approach applied in this article, while also underscoring the emergence of a military self that goes beyond the individual.

Not Being a *Real* Soldier

Enacted the right way, the uniform participates in making conscripts recognizable as good soldiers. Yet the uniform can also become a source of annoyance when it obstructs the desire to be recognized as a *real soldier*. At the time of my fieldwork, the army was changing its uniforms from a green to a khaki camouflage pattern.[3] This was said to be due to the Danish Armed Forces' engagement in missions to countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq where the environment is warmer and less fertile than the green and often cold Danish woods for which the old uniform seemed to be designed. The introduction of the new uniform thus materializes a change in Danish foreign and defence politics, while also marking differences in hierarchy, as the new uniform was implemented in a way that prioritized those soldiers closest to "the front". As a result, conscripts and volunteer members of the Danish Home Guard were the only service members whose uniforms were still green when I did this participatory fieldwork in the spring of 2016.

Conscripts lined up in their green uniforms, with commanders in khaki uniforms moving more freely in the background.

While many of the conscripts at first wore their uniform home on weekends, the excitement in this ultimately wore off for most of them. A few weeks before being discharged, I asked Christoffersen if he travelled home in his uniform, and he explained that he did not feel pride in "wearing a uniform that anyone gets to put on if they just pass the medical check [at the draft]" (Interview with Christoffersen). The previous three-and-a-half months in the armed forces had taught the conscripts to decode (and reproduce) this entangled matter of the uniforms: Our green uniform became less prestigious, as it reflected holding the lowest possible rank and revealed that we had not been anywhere close to the line of fire.

While the uniform had participated in the becoming of these young soldiers, it was simultaneously pushing back through the entangled elements that were made visible to the conscripts themselves. Explaining why he had stopped wearing his uniform while travelling home, Buster told me:

> At first, I thought it was cool […] But it's just that now *I know* that to be a real soldier you wear that [khaki] uniform. And the rest of the world doesn't know that, but I know that now when I look at us. I know that this [green] uniform… You might as well be part of the Home Guard to wear this. And I'm not that big of a fan of the Home Guard. (Interview with Buster)

References to the Danish Home Guard were made numerous times throughout the four months and did not have positive connotations, likely because members of this volunteer service were perceived as being even further from 'real' soldiers than the conscripts were. Thus, having the same uniforms as the members of this service was considered to be a drawback, decreasing the pride that many had felt when first wearing the green uniform. Here, the uniformity established through the green uniform became an obstacle to recognition. In this way, the uniform not only functioned as an element in the enactment of recognizable military subjects but equally as a materialized obstacle to these conscripts being able to recognize themselves – because being *a good soldier* did not necessarily mean being *a real soldier*.

A good soldier, as illustrated throughout this article, is someone who has the tacit knowledge of unwritten or unspoken expectations and rules, and who can instinctively apply them in changing sit-

uations; someone who can quickly read situations and translate them into an acceptable performance. The figure of the *real soldier* appeared during the conscription period as a sort of abstract potential lurking on the horizon. When asked during interviews if they would define themselves as real soldiers, most conscripts distanced themselves from this category, as it was associated with the possibility of actually being in the line of fire (see also Pedersen 2017). Yet, while being in the line of fire was considered to be miles away from being a conscript, the daily routines of control and correction still entangled the military uniform with this prospect of becoming a real soldier. Being a good soldier meant always being ready for the line of fire – just in case this possibility ever appeared with its promise of reconfiguring us into real soldiers. As one of my room-mates wrote on the first page of his notebook: "Be ready, all the time." (Field notes week 1)

To return to the quotation that opened this article, when I was yelled at for looking "like shit" that morning in the woods, it was not only a comment on my unbuttoned jacket or my missing hat. It was a comment on me not being ready, all the time. It was the visible absence of daily routines that should have assured me (and the collective self) that I had everything in order. I would never have walked around in such disarray inside the military camp where the routines were well-established and the collective self would have controlled and corrected me before standing in front of the sergeants. But in the woods, the routines and shared choreography that I knew from the dorm room had changed. And, as it turned out, I did not have the tacit knowledge of how the uniform should be practised in this setting, which resulted in a moment of failed recognition.

Conclusion

Conscription seems to give the armed forces the possibility to create the good, disciplined soldiers they want and need – at least in those cases where the conscripts are willing subjects who enact recognizable subject positions. The uniforms worn by conscripts as well as sergeants play a key role in this process, as they enable not only a sense of cohesion but also disciplining practices of control and correction. To Sergeant Wilson, this was "just a test of their discipline" (Interview with Sgt. Wilson) but as my analysis has suggested, uniforms participate in a more complex processual becoming of good soldiers.

As I illustrated in the first part of this article, uniformity helps create cohesion between conscripts by downplaying traits of individuality. This showed itself to be further emphasized by routines of control and correction that established not only military selves but also a collective self. The disciplining mechanisms tied to the uniform not only enable the disciplining of individual soldiers, but concurrently constitute the recognition of good soldier as dependent on a collective self. Being a good soldier is therefore not only up to the individual conscript to perform: Sharing a dorm room with someone who always lost equipment or who had no desire to be recognized as a good soldier affected the rest of us.

Conscripts need to wear a uniform to be recognizable as soldiers, yet simply wear-

ing the uniform is not sufficient; it needs to be practised in certain ways that make the conscript recognizable as a military subject. But as the uniform's entanglement changed, matters of rank, authority, discipline, cohesion, and gender also shifted. The required adaptation in the performance of good soldiers would sometimes challenge recognition as a conscript's gender or lack of hierarchical status could stand out all too intrusively. Ascribing greater agency to it than much previous research has done, the uniform seemed to push back and participate in the negotiation and work that went into the becoming of military subjects.

Previous studies of uniforms have already shown how their matter can change. Leilund's (2015) ethnographic work on the use of uniforms within three different professions, for instance, suggests that the matter of the uniform is dependent on the practice of which it is a part, and that the uniform and its wearer are mutually co-constitutive. Adding to this argument, I would emphasize that the professional becoming-with the uniform – in this case, within the armed forces – is crucial to the becoming of the profession itself. Larsson (2008) discusses how a uniform makes an employee "carry the institution with him" (2008:12), but based on my analysis, I would add that the institution is not only "carried"; it is constructed, negotiated, and practised through the use of uniforms.

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Notes

1 I draw on a total of 35 interviews with conscripts and commanders who were all part of the same platoon. Interviews were conducted during the last few weeks of the four-month conscription period. Additionally, I draw on a week of observations from draft examinations (*session*), smaller contrasting bits of fieldwork at other regiments in the army, a few additional interviews, as well as reports and other written materials. All persons mentioned in the article have been given a different name to cover their identity.

2 To make this an easier read for those not familiar with the military ranking system, the term "sergeants" is used to refer to superiors, who were often non-commissioned officers (NCOs), while a few were corporals or sergeants in training.

3 The new uniform was described as "beige" in my first draft, which provoked strong reactions from some military scholars; beige is apparently not a colour to be associated with the armed forces.

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